

APPENDIX 15 – COMMENTS ON DRAFT CMP AND RESPONSES

Public Review of the Draft CMP

The public review of the draft CMP began on August 5, 2003, and ended on October 5, 2003. Notice of the availability of the draft plan was published in the *Washington Post-Southern Maryland Edition* and *Maryland Independent*. In addition, notices were posted on the BLM-Eastern States and Maryland DNR Internet home pages. One public workshop was held in La Plata on August 20, 2003. The original 30-day comment period was extended an additional 30 days in response to requests from the public.

In addition to comment letters from members of the public, interest groups and agencies within the State of Maryland government, we received a letter from the Charles County Board of Commissioners. That letter outlined the County's preferred alternative (Alternative 3 from the draft CMP) and requested close involvement by the County in future planning efforts. It also formally stated the County's interest and willingness to manage the Wilson Farm property.

Responses to Public Comments

Over seventy distinct public concern (PC) statements were identified in the review of the comment letters and emails. Many of the statements have been combined and the responses to these statements have been addressed in the following section.

Planning Process and Public Participation

PC 1. The comment period should be extended to allow for the adequate review of the draft plan.

PC 2. The public meeting was held at the same time as the back to school meeting at the local high school that did not afford some people to the opportunity to attend the planning meeting.

Response: We apologize for scheduling the public workshop at the same time as the high school meeting. We were trying to avoid scheduling the meeting during the final week before Labor Day. As result of several requests from the public, we extended the comment period by 30-days. Notification was through the same media outlets as the original notice.

PC 3. In Chapter 5, Nanjemoy Vision Inc. should be identified as an “interested party”.

Response: The text has been changed.

Acquisitions and Acquisition Criteria

PC 4. BLM and DNR should acquire more land.

Response: One of the objectives of the plan is to identify the types of land that would be appropriate for future acquisitions. Under the Proposed CMP, BLM and DNR would pursue additional purchases of land from willing sellers that meet the acquisition criteria (See PC 5 below), subject to available funding.

PC 5. The acquisition criteria should be clarified (e.g., GreenPrint).

Response: Language has been inserted into the plan that clearly defines the acquisition criteria to include the State's GreenPrint evaluation criteria, BLM's *Land and Water Conservation Fund* ranking system and the goals and objectives of the CMP. Under the Proposed CMP, BLM and the State would entertain proposals for purchase to promote conservation, cultural and historic resource preservation and interpretation and outdoor recreation, subject to available funding.

PC 6. [Page 1-2] The proposed plan should clarify whether the government would buy the remaining Maryland tract *after* it has been mined or only before.

Response: Any land proposed for acquisition will be analyzed against the acquisition criteria. Only properties that meet these criteria will be considered for acquisition.

PC 7. Active uses should be confined to Wilson Farm/Maryland Point or should wait until another suitable tract can be acquired for that use/activity.

Response: In general, the plan limits development to the Wilson Farm tract. Maryland Point may also be suitable for camping, day use facilities and other development. Specific project development, including trails, parking and the heritage center will require additional site analysis. If this analysis exposes resource or construction limitations, the proposed uses may need to be similarly limited until an appropriate site is found or acquired.

PC 8. Any intensive uses for Douglas Point should be consider only east of MD 224

Response: The CMP limits development on the west side of MD 224. The property will, however, be open to trail use subject to additional analysis. See also PC 7.

Recreation Management, Facilities and Trails**PC 9. Maryland Route 224 should be considered as a hiking and biking trail.**

Response: Maryland Route 224 is a State road and a change in use would require the approval of the Maryland State Highway Administration and the support of Charles County. Trail location options will be studied in a later phase of planning and the justification and feasibility of this option can be considered at that time.

PC 10. There should a small (10-15 cars) parking lot at the trailheads.

Response: The concept of smaller lots located near facilities is desirable as it facilitates user access, it blends with the surrounding natural environment, and it could reduce resource impact. The size, number, and location of parking areas will be examined in later phases of planning and during design. The descriptions in the CMP were used to illustrate how the alternatives vary.

PC 11. The final plan should consider smaller parking lots in more locations than fewer larger lots. This will reduce forest fragmentation and local impacts.

Response: The CMP directs development toward areas that are already cleared or disturbed. See also PC 10.

PC 12. The final plan should identify each property under the *Recreation Opportunity Spectrum* classification system. The ROS would be the best guide to the proper management of the tracts.

Response: The CMP has been revised to incorporate the ROS classification system where appropriate for the Federal tracts.

PC 13. Primitive camping rather than RV platform or cabin campsites is more appropriate for the area.

Response: BLM and DNR will consider the compatibility of campsites with the surroundings. Initially, all campsites will be primitive. If RV, platform or cabin campsites were considered, it would be in areas that evidence previous disturbance, such as Maryland Point or Wilson Farm.

PC 14. Commercial guide permits should be allowed under Alternative 1.

Response: Alternative 1 does allow commercial permits on State land, as does the Proposed CMP.

PC 15. Single use trails would avoid dangerous user conflicts, such as pedestrian/horse interaction.

Response: BLM and DNR prefer multiuse trails to serve a wide variety of users. Trail options will be explored in an upcoming phase of planning and will take into consideration site suitability, user needs, and conflicting uses. Potential design and management controls will also be explored for their capacity to reduce or eliminate potential user conflicts.

PC 16. Primitive campsites at all properties should be available as part of a water trail.

Response: Water trail access points and support sites, such as camping, will be analyzed in the next phase of planning, for consistency with the Potomac River Water Trail, and compatibility with the standards currently used for water trail facilities. The idea of all the campsites near the water trail being available to water trail users will be considered with the other water trail issues during the next phase of planning.

PC 17. There should be small group camping areas for paddlers along the shore.

Response: The next planning phase will explore the possibilities of both individual and group camping for paddlers.

PC 18. Douglas Point and Purse State Park west of Maryland Route 224 should be designated for foot trails only. Mountain biking east of MD 224 would be appropriate, with attention to the stream tributaries of Nanjemoy Creek.

Response: DNR prefers multiuse trails to serve a wide variety of users. Trail use options will be explored in the next phase of planning and will take into consideration site suitability, user needs, conflicting uses, and possible impacts. Potential design and management controls will also be explored for their capacity to reduce or eliminate potential user conflicts.

PC 19. The plan should reference the Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail. Portions of the trail should be identified in Charles County.

Response: To complement plans by Charles and Prince Georges counties and others, we acknowledge the need to identify one or more alignments for the Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail in detailed implementation plans for recreational uses and educational programs for the area.

PC 20. The plan should better define what is meant by “blue way” and how the plan attempts to serve the development of one.

Response: “Blue ways” are the same as water trails. They are identified corridors along the water by which non-motorized boats can travel, primarily through natural areas having points of historical or environmental interest, designated stopping points, and access to restrooms, campsites or other support facilities. The next phase of planning will identify appropriate locations for designated access and stopping points in support of and consistent with the existing Potomac River Water Trail.

PC 21. Mountain biking and equestrian trails may be appropriate, but should avoid sensitive ecological areas. It should be noted that these uses are available at the nearby Doncaster State Forest.

Response: The environmental assessment and planning process utilized by BLM and DNR do identify and avoid sensitive ecological areas and consider similar regional facilities and activities for possible duplicity or new links.

PC 22. Mountain biking trails should be considered for all or some of the properties.

Response: The CMP states that non-motorized biking will be considered. Trail use options will be further explored in the next phase of planning.

PC 23. Structures, such as shelters, do not necessarily need to be on every property. The proposed plan should limit the number and locations of the structures and other public amenities.

Response: The CMP directs the development of facilities to Wilson Farm and Maryland Point, where evidence of prior disturbance is apparent.

PC 24. Limit the number of ADA-accessible trails to Wilson Farm. Primitive trails should be acceptable on the other properties.

Response: The trail system within the Douglas Point properties, Purse and Wilson Farm will primarily utilize existing trails, with the addition of signs and possible new extensions or connections between BLM and State trails. The CMP also proposes a signed primitive and improved (ADA-accessible) trail system at Wilson Farm. Any additional details will be developed in the next phase of the planning process and design.

PC 25. Limit new trails on Douglas Point to connect existing trails to protect important environmental resources.

Response: The CMP calls for this approach, except for Maryland Point, where there is no existing trail system.

PC 26. Limit construction to Wilson Farm (e.g., interpretative facility).

Response: The CMP proposes to limit construction to Wilson Farm and possibly Maryland Point, pending additional planning and environmental assessment.

PC 27. Clarify what will be accomplished by building one size of interpretative/heritage facility over another (i.e., 1500 sq. ft. versus 5000 sq. ft.)

Response: The descriptions in the CMP were used to provide an illustration of how the alternatives considered vary. A smaller facility would not accommodate as much information in terms of displays, staff or volunteers, and support areas, such as a presentation room/area.

PC 28. The area that should be considered for future acquisition should go beyond the “red line” identified in the draft CMP.

Response: To expand the planning area boundary at this point is impractical under BLM’s planning regulations. A revised draft CMP would need to be circulated to include the additional resource data and analysis. The State, under its rules, could consider proposals outside of the “red line” if they meet the acquisition criteria (See Page 15-1 of this Appendix).

PC 29. More, but smaller, parking lots should be considered over larger lots.

Response: The CMP proposes smaller lots near trailheads and only considers larger lots on the developed sites, Wilson Farm and Maryland Point, to support facilities planned for these sites. The size, number, and location of parking areas will be examined in later phases of planning and during design.

PC 30. Horse trails are appropriate east of MD 224 at Douglas Point. Any trails should avoid (buffer) along the stream tributaries of Nanjemoy Creek.

Response: Trail use options and potential impacts will be further explored in an upcoming phase of planning.

Environmental Impacts

PC 31. Any increased human activity will result in a negative impact on the ecosystem.

Response: Potential impacts of facilities and activities are considered in the resource assessment conducted as part of this planning effort to identify areas suitable for public use as well as areas with sensitive resources, which should be avoided. Once in full use, monitoring the results that increased human activity may have on a site and making appropriate management adjustments will serve to protect the ecosystem and its resources.

PC 32. Before any boat ramps are built at Wilson Farm/Mallows Bay, additional environmental studies should be conducted. These studies should also determine how motorized and non-motorized boat ramps could be designed with minimal environmental impact and use conflicts.

Response: We agree. The next phases of the planning process followed by the design process, will involve additional assessment of the aquatic environment, consideration of appropriate design, and reduction of use conflicts.

PC 33. BLM and DNR should not allow dredging for boat access. The initial as well as additional dredging to keep channels open would destroy underwater grasses, fish habitat and stir up bottom sediment.

Response: Additional assessment of the need for dredging, its effect, and options for mitigation will be studied by the State in the next planning phase, by staff familiar with aquatic resources and with channel clearance/maintenance operations.

PC 34. The Douglas Point property should be kept in its current state and no development should occur on it.

Response: The CMP directs development of facilities to Wilson Farm and Maryland Point, where evidence of prior disturbance is apparent.

PC 35. [Pg 3-23] The number of truck trips should be 400 to account for round trips.

Response: The text has been changed to account for round trips.

PC 36. Conduct a study on submerged aquatic vegetation before constructing any boat ramps to analyze impacts.

Response: The next phases of the planning process will require additional information about the aquatic environment in the vicinity of the proposed boat launch. This information is needed to evaluate the potential impacts and to aid in the identification of feasible options for mitigating the effects of using the boat launch and the channel connecting with the Potomac River.

Boat Ramps/River Access

PC 37. There should be no additional motorized boat access at Wilson Farm. If there is, there should be separate access areas to ensure the safety of non-motorized boat users as there is at Smallwood.

Response: The possibility of separate access points will be explored in the next phases of the planning process.

PC 38. There should be non-motorized boat access facilities at several locations, including Purse State Park. There should foot access across Purse State Park.

Response: These options will be explored in the next phase of the planning process.

PC 39. There should be no additional river access at any of the properties.

Response: Public access to the Potomac River in Charles County has long been in high demand. The only viable water access site within the federal/state public lands identified in the CMP is located at Wilson Farm and will be given further consideration in the next phase of the planning process.

PC 40. Having motorized and non-motorized boat access at Wilson Farm is incompatible because of noise and safety concerns.

Response: There are operational and management mechanisms that help to minimize noise and safety issues which are worthy of further consideration.

PC 41. Page 2-13 states that there could be a non-motorized boat put-in at Maryland Point, but there is no mention of a boat ramp at Wilson Farm in Alternatives 2-4. This omission should be corrected.

Response: The table states that under Alternatives 2-4, both motorized and non-motorized boat ramps would be allowed at Wilson Farm, subject to further review.

PC 42. It may be possible for a larger boat ramp to be constructed at Maryland Point. It may be best to include it in the final plan.

Response: A non-motorized boat put-in at Maryland Point is included in the proposed plan. The access point located on BLM property would require considerable modification to render it safe and useable, but it is possible. The shoreline at Maryland Point is exposed and the water is shallow for a long distance offshore, which renders the site less suitable for boat access.

PC 43. The number and size of access roads from MD 224 to the river should be limited.

Response: The Proposed CMP calls for maintaining the existing primitive trails/roads and does not call for new roads. Access by off-road and motorized vehicles is restricted to government personnel on official business and communication site lessees to operate and maintain the site.

Implementation and Design Criteria

PC 44. The final plan should be implemented gradually and should be flexible to meet the most needs of the community without damaging the ecosystem and other resources.

Response: BLM and DNR concur with this approach.

PC 45. Clarify the statement “Subject to Project Review” under Alternatives 2-4 for Wilson Farm.

Response: The DNR Project Review process is a coordinated cross-departmental review of proposed modifications to public land to consider impacts, conflicts or concerns prior to project implementation. Completion of this process may be necessary in order to obtain other permits and approvals required to implement a project.

PC 46. Several comments included specific design ideas for building materials, “dark sky” lighting, and other low impact development techniques.

Response: These ideas will be considered during the site-designing and architectural/engineering phases.

PC 47. Any final plan should consider modest development, but with enough flexibility to allow for future recreation needs and improved budgets.

Response: The Proposed CMP proposes modest development with enough flexibility to respond to future needs and increased capital funding.

PC 48. Local stewardship under a signed memorandum of understanding should be considered to assist in regular maintenance projects and other activities.

Response: We will be pursuing formal and informal agreements, where appropriate, during implementation for maintenance projects and for other activities.

PC 49. Future planning and site designing phases should emphasize cooperation and collaboration with local community groups.

Response: BLM and DNR anticipate future workshops, informational meetings or participation in community meetings to provide updates, keep the local community informed, and to share information throughout the remaining phases of planning and design.

Plan Goals, Themes and Alternatives

PC 50. The proposed plan should consider and include aspects of Alternatives 2-4, depending on the property (e.g., less intensive development for Douglas Point/Purse State Park and more development at Maryland Point/Wilson Farm)

Response: The Proposed CMP considered a “mix and match” approach of selecting options from other Alternatives to develop the most suitable alternative.

PC 51. The “No Action” alternative should be better explained.

Response: The National Environmental Policy Act requires Federal agencies to consider an alternative in which current management would not be changed. Under existing management guidance, the Federal portion of Douglas Point is open to day-use hiking, wildlife observation and hunting (subject to State regulations). Maryland Point would remain closed until the site is cleaned-up. Under the no action alternative, this guidance would not be altered for either tract. This alternative is useful because it provides a baseline with which to view all other alternatives. It also highlights how environmental impacts may be greater without new management. Although consideration of the no action alternative is required by NEPA for Federal actions, analysis of the no action alternative was conducted for the state properties as well, and evaluated according to the state’s existing guidance, which varies from the criteria used for BLM properties. This may result in different issues and resolutions between the Federal and state levels for similar issues.

PC 52. Wilson Farm should be permanently designated as a Wildlife Management Area

Response: As part of the next planning phase, (the development of a Land Unit Plan for the state properties), appropriate designations for Wilson Farm will be considered.

PC 53. The proposed plan should clearly identify the goal for the Douglas Point tract to be for natural resource protection.

Response: While natural resource protection is a key goal, the provision of compatible recreational opportunities and overall management are also important.

PC 54. The primary goal of the plan should be the protection of wildlife and plant protection. Other uses could be considered if it does not cause excessive damage to plants and wildlife.

Response: See previous response.

PC 55. [Pg. 1-5] Add “Civil War” to the list under Cultural and historic preservation and interpretation.

Response: The text has been changed to include the reference.

PC 56. Consider integrating the properties into the proposed “Bay National Park.”

Response: The Bay National Park study is not far enough along in its evolution to evaluate how or if the Lower Potomac River CMP meets or exceeds BNP criteria. Consideration of how the LPR CMP relates to the BNP can be given when the BNP study is farther along in its development.

Hunting

PC 57. Hunting should be allowed, but should be managed to avoid hunter/non-hunter conflicts.

Response: The Proposed CMP allows hunting. There are standard measures that can be implemented prior to and during the hunting season to make users and others aware of when and where the hunting will occur and how to reduce any potential conflicts.

Forestry and Fire Management

PC 58. There should be no commercial timber harvesting.

Response: Prior to any activity which may impact the forests on these lands, the State will develop a Forest Management Plan (FMP) to assess the forest resources, provide an overview and summary of its status, and to make recommendations regarding management activities necessary to maintain or enhance the forest health. The goal of the FMP is to identify ways in which to restore, manage, and protect the trees, forest and forest ecosystems in a sustainable manner. The Plan will acknowledge the importance of sustaining forest ecosystems to protect unique and sensitive resources as well as providing for continued use of the forest to meet environmental, economic and social needs. The FMP will include an assessment of the potential for managing

the forest to meet various natural resource objectives including wildlife habitat improvement, water quality improvement, timber production and recreation. Silvicultural treatments such as harvesting, thinning and reforestation recommended in the Forest Management Plan will be competitively bid; any proceeds realized would be used to support management operations on the property.

PC 59. [Pg 4-10] Is the “fire line” something that is done preemptively or only if a fire breaks out?

Response: A fire line, with associated soil and plant disturbance, would only be implemented if there were an active fire near by.

PC 60. Selective harvesting should not be allowed.

Response: Forest management will be conducted according to scientific principles that sustain the overall health, quality and quantity of the forest. The Forest Management Plan may recommend the selective removal of individual trees or groups of trees to facilitate regeneration, to improve growth rates or to meet habitat or recreational objectives. Sensitive resource areas are always identified and, where necessary, avoided during harvest operations.

PC 61. [Pg. 2-1, 3] No logging should be allowed in order to protect Forest Interior Dwelling [bird] Species (FIDS).

Response: The State’s Wildlife and Heritage Service, in cooperation with other DNR programs, has developed management guidelines that detail habitat protection needs for FIDS. In FIDS habitat areas, forest-harvesting practices conducted on the property will adhere to specific standards including minimization of disturbances during the breeding season, forest density that must remain after harvest and the development and maintenance of habitat buffers.

PC 62. There should be no tree cutting or harvesting for trail construction.

Response: Trail design will attempt to optimize the use of natural openings in the forest canopy and understory or will utilize previously disturbed areas to avoid unnecessary tree cutting. Despite avoidance methods, some minimal tree cutting may be necessary for public safety, resource protection and aesthetic reasons.

Mining

PC 63. [Pg 3-20] Mining should not be included in the list of commodities with “Agriculture.”

Response: According to the 2000 Census of the United States, less than one-percent of the total workforce of Charles County was employed in the agriculture, forestry, fishing and mining *industries*. The sentence should not be read to imply that mining was a commodity related to agriculture. Source: Census 2000, Table DP-1, Profile of General Demographic Characteristics, Geographic Area, Charles County, MD.

PC 64. [Appendix 5-2] This section should describe the impacts from the proposed mining at the adjacent Maryland Rock operation.

Response: We do not have information regarding the proposed mining operations, so we did not evaluate specific impacts from such activities.

Clarifications and Corrections

PC 65. [Pg. 3-19] There is a conflict between the VRM classification on this page and Table 5 on Pg. 4-19. Is it Class I or Class II?

Response: The statement on the table is correct. The text on page 3-19 has been corrected.

PC 66. Add explanation of State Rural Legacy Program in Appendix 11.

Response: The appendix now has a description of the Rural Legacy Program.

PC 67. [Pg. 3-22, Table 4] Is Douglas Point grouped with Malloys Bay/Wilson Farm in this table?

Response: The County's nature tourism plan was developed before the Douglas Point property was acquired and was not, therefore, included in the summary table of that plan.

PC 68. [Pg. 4-1, Assumption #4] The planning/implementation timeline does not account for some immediate needs to protect sensitive resources.

Response: This assumption was designed to guide the analysis. Some proposals will be implemented upon approval of the plan, while others will require additional site-specific analysis before they can be implemented.

PC 69. Table 1 in Chapter 2 is difficult to analyze. The Table in Chapter 4 describes activities much better.

Response: Table 1 provides an overview for quick comparison between the Alternatives. Table 5 identifies potential environmental impacts.

PC 70. Is the bulleted list on Page 1-6 prioritized? If so, line 9 should be moved to the top of the list.

Response: The list is not prioritized.

Economics

PC 71. Explain costs/benefits of timber, mining rights-of-way, etc on state-owned lands.

Response: Sustainable forests provide considerable environmental, social and economic benefits. The economic costs include expenditures for personnel and operational resources necessary to administer timber sales, inspect for compliance with required best management practices, develop Forest Management Plans, and implement regeneration strategies. The economic benefit encompasses all the values derived from healthy forests: water quality improvement, wildlife habitat enhancement, carbon sequestration, nutrient recycling, air and water purification, user license fees and out of pocket expenses paid by those that use the forests for hunting, fishing or other recreational activities dependent upon the quality of the natural resources; the jobs and taxes

generated, and the value-added or secondary economic contributions made by trucking and processing of wood into lumber or fiber.

There are no mining rights of way proposed in the CMP.

PC 72. [Pg 4-22] Remove the reference to “selective harvesting” in the economic analysis section. Selective harvesting should not be allowed under any circumstances.

Response: The proposal to allow selective harvesting for the State land is consistent with the overall goal to improve habitat and forest health, reduce catastrophic wildfire risks, protect sensitive resources and provide economic benefit to the people of Maryland.

